

Pataphysics

By Peter David Smith

Pataphysics, to be fully effective, should be practiced in relation to complementary techniques such as surrealism, speculativism and phenomenology.

It begins with absurdism and gains political force from dada. The principle of sports and games may be used but only in a supportive and corrupt form.

The corruption of any sport or game element ensures that rules are continuously transformed into non-competitive analogues of misunderstood life lessons and wisdom surrogates.

Pataphysics starts from a base of the absurd but proceeds by means of logic and rational methodology. Where absurdism would be content with creations of impossible or non-sensical arrangements of things, pataphysics develops these absurdities in a way which makes sense.

The procedure is similar to building castles in the air.

We begin with an absurd idea, such as “It would be a good idea for castles to float in the air”. We then move to the planning stage. How to get that castle up there and how to maintain it.

We would need plans, blueprints, building materials, some means of remaining in the air, methods of reaching the floating castle once it is built and methods of getting back down again to visit our friends on the ground.

Another example would be “Thousands of books can be stored in something the size of a matchbox”. A hundred years ago the methods by which such a thing could be achieved were not yet known but the pataphysics of it could still be explored at a theoretical level. Eventually a good pataphysician would be examining various ways of storing information, various methods of retrieving that information and they would be dreaming of the technologies which could do the job.

Therefore the relationship between absurdism and pataphysics is that of a bridge between the incredible and the credible.

So in pataphysics we have a method for getting from the fantastic to the real and, of course, that bridge can be crossed in both directions.

Surrealism manages to preserve the inherent nature of the absurdity even as we proceed across the pataphysical bridge into a real construction job. Thus surrealism gives us a lifeline back into the original madness in case we lose our way in the dangerous world of sanity.

We can imagine a pataphysician and a surrealist making the same journey from an absurd idea such as “Dances may be performed at every level of the Eiffel Tower by people dressed as animals” to the actual choreographing of these dances and the very practical bribing of Eiffel Tower staff to permit such a thing. However the surrealist would go further by imagining that the dancers could then be shackled like dray horses to pull the Eiffel Tower into the ocean where it would transform into an underwater city of human/animal hybrids.

Thus the inevitable running down of the absurdist energy when the pataphysician has made the project become real can be saved and re-energised by the surrealist’s continual adding in of additional dream ideas. The pataphysician is then confronted with exciting new challenges.

In the event that we lose our surrealist lifeline and become trapped in the real world speculativism is our emergency method for re-establishing contact with the non-sensical juxtapositioning of chaotic

imaginings. Speculativism will also enable us to navigate equally well in the worlds of the logical, the intuitive, the counter-intuitive and the just plain nuts.

Phenomenology is related to these techniques insofar as it is able to suspend disbelief in conceptual pocket universes which can be permitted to function by their own bespoke arrangements of physical laws and probability matrices.

Bear in mind that imagined phenomena are as important a power in the world as any “real” thing. The phenomenon itself may not necessarily be aware of its own lack of substance.

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